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Illinois River Story Board

How did we get here?

- Oklahoma has six Scenic Rivers, which include the Illinois River and two of its tributaries. Oklahoma's water quality standards apply a phosphorous criterion of magnitude 0.037 mg/L to the Scenic Rivers, but levels are often found to be in the range of 0.01 - 0.15 mg/L in the Illinois River near the Arkansas-Oklahoma border.
- The Clean Water Act and its implementing regulations require that an upstream state's water quality standards be protective of downstream state water quality standards.
- NPDES regulations prohibit pollutant discharges which may cause or contribute to an in-stream excursion above water quality criteria and also require that permit effluent limits must be consistent with the assumptions and requirements of any approved waste load allocation (WLA).
- Since late 2009, EPA Region 6 has been engaged in efforts to develop a robust scientifically defensible water quality model of the Illinois River Watershed (IRW) in northeast Oklahoma and northwest Arkansas. States, tribes, and local stakeholders have been engaged throughout the project.

A Tale of Worry

- Historically, Arkansas has expressed concern that Oklahoma's current phosphorus criterion for Scenic Rivers is overly stringent; while Oklahoma has maintained that it is appropriately protective of designated uses and the Scenic status applicable these waters.
- Point source dischargers in the IRW watershed are concerned that establishment of a total maximum daily load (TMDL) will require expensive controls to meet waste load allocations for nutrients.
- Non-point sources in the IRW watershed are concerned that the establishment of a TMDL provide pressure to accomplish regulatory and non-regulatory load reductions.

Where are we now?

- The modeling effort relies on two highly specialized computer models – a watershed model (HSPF) and lake model (EFDC) – and is designed to reproduce conditions within the IRW.
- EPA has completed calibration and validation of the watershed and lake models, as well as an independent peer review of the models.
- EPA released the models to the public on October 1, 2015.
- EPA provided modeling training to the Oklahoma and Arkansas principals from October 27 – November 6, 2015 and is currently engaged with state and tribal partners assisting their review of the models.
- EPA is convening the second in a series of Technical Workgroup Meetings which is scheduled for April 21-22, 2016 and to be hosted by the Cherokee Nation in the Illinois River Watershed.

Where are we going?

- Once the principals complete their review, EPA will hold a public meeting to review the models, discuss next steps, and receive comments from all stakeholders.
- The modeling effort will help to identify potential pollution control measures designed to improve water quality in the IRW watershed by reducing phosphorus from sources in both states.
- The goal is to draft TMDLs based on the modeling and work with Arkansas and Oklahoma to tailor the TMDLs and have the states submit the TMDLs to EPA for approval.

How much skin does EPA have in the game?

- EPA has invested approximately \$1.5 million in contracts over the last 7 years in the project.
- Additionally, EPA has invested approximately 0.75 FTE for the past 7 years in the project.